

## Moral Questions & Issues

- **A man and a woman in their mid-sixties have been seeing each other for the past few months. He is a practicing Catholic who has been a widower for a few years and has no children from his marriage of over 40 years. She is a non-Catholic, but is spiritual, who has been divorced for over 15 years from an unfaithful husband. She had been married for almost 30 years, has two grown children and four grandchildren. Neither the man nor the woman are capable of having children either now or in the future. As of yet, they have not had “relations” with one another or anyone else since now they are seeking only friendship and good company with each other. But time will tell if they want more than that.**

In an ideal situation, both partners would be Catholic. Ideally, they would be content to continue in their friendship while living apart and practicing their Catholicism together at mass forever. As we all see however, this situation is very far from ideal and it begs many questions.

We are taught the purpose of marriage is to bring God’s children into the world. This couple cannot have children, so would the Church encourage them to get married if at some point they want to have relations? Or does it not matter? Also, she will not convert. Is marriage even an option? What does the Church say today about the morals of this elderly couple living together some day while unmarried? Would God condemn them or would He call upon His wisdom and understanding to bless them and encourage them to love one another while this late in their lives?

In short, here is the question: Can they get married, or can they live together or will the Church simply not honor this relationship in any way?

What other questions regarding the Catholic Church does this relationship present? If time permits, feel free to explore the many other concerns existing here and how best to resolve them.

- **This couple (question above) cannot have children, so would the Church encourage them to get married if at some point they want to have relations? Or does it not matter?**

Certainly it matters and if they are going to have sexual relations they must marry.

If the couple is considering “having relations – sex” then they must marry. An intimate union (a giving in love toward each other) is intended only between spouses.

CCC 2361 “Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.”(FC 11).

CCC 2353 Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children. Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is corruption of the young.

Whether or not the couple can conceive has nothing to do with the fact that they should be married. CCC 1654 Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.

Finally, who are we to decide whether conception is possible. Nothing is impossible for God.

What about Sarah? What about Elizabeth?

But the LORD said to Abraham: “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really bear a child, old as I am?’ Is anything too marvelous for the LORD to do? At the appointed time, about this time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son.” (Genesis 18:13-14)

And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” (Luke 1:36-38)

b. Can they get married, or can they live together or will the Church simply not honor this relationship in any way?

Yes, they can get married. They should not live together as it may create scandal.

- **What is the Catholic teaching of suicide especially teen and children and how should the community respond to this tragedy?**

A. What is the Catholic teaching of suicide especially teen and children?

A person who, clear of mind and intent, “willfully and knowingly” chooses suicide would be considered to be in a state of mortal sin. The church in her

moral wisdom acknowledges, however, that most people who die by suicide suffer terribly and are often not clear of mind and intent; they are often afflicted with mental illness and are thus incapable of making a clear, rational decision.

"Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of" (CCC 2280).

We must remember though that for a sin to be mortal, the objective action (in this case the taking of one's own life) must be grave or serious matter; the person must have an informed intellect (know that this is wrong); and the person must give full consent of the will (intend to commit this action). In the case of suicide, a person may not have given full consent of the will. Fear, force, ignorance, habit, passion, and psychological problems can impede the exercise of the will so that a person may not be fully responsible or even responsible at all for an action. The Catechism states, "Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide" (CCC 2282).

"We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to Him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives" (CCC 2283).

B. How should the community respond to this tragedy?

How people respond to a suicide will be influenced by several things: their personality, age, connection to the deceased, cultural traditions, previous experiences of death, the emotional environment in which they live, and also their healthy spiritual/moral identity in the Lord.

There are a variety of ways in which the community can support survivors.

- Recognize the unique challenges in grieving the loss of a loved one from suicide.
- Reach out to draw family/survivors into the community's living presence of the Risen Lord and into its normal spiritual life. Deliberate inclusiveness is an important antidote to the inappropriate stigma that so often accompanies a death due to suicide. The vibrant faith community should be an important expression of God's love and grace for the grieving.

- Support them with the same gestures of kindness that are extended to others who have deaths in the family (taking in meals, etc.).
- Talk with the survivors about the deceased in the same sensitive way they would about any other person who had recently died. This openness will help the surviving family remember the powerful Mercy of God and overcome any embarrassment or shame they may be feeling.
- Refrain from speculation (i.e. why he/she took their life). We may suspect, but none of us knows the “real” reason why the person did what they did.
- Don’t talk about Heaven or Hell. We don’t know the condition of another person’s soul or his/her mind at the time of death. Only God knows.

- **The problem of good and evil - If God is good, why does he allow evil acts?**

Evil is simply the opposite or absence of good. (CCC Glossary)

Charity: The theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God (CCC Glossary)

To have a free will and to be able to love means that we must have the capacity also to reject the good and do evil. Love does not force Himself on anyone but rather offers Himself to be received and celebrated in the lives of all the beloved. God is Love! We are created from (out of) love in order to love. Charity or love is not a programmed response but requires the exercise of every person’s free will. For example, a robot that is programmed to only do good cannot love. Therefore, to love requires the choice to deny love or to hate, to do good or to choose evil. Evil therefore finds its origin not in God but in human or angelic rebellion against God or in the basic sense the misuse of freedom by humans and angels - sin. “Evil is permitted by God, who knows how to derive good from it, in order to respect the freedom of his creatures,” (CCC 111). For example, our Salvation is God’s response to evil in the world. In fact, “there is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil,” (CCC 309). “Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life, “(CCC 324)

CCC 310 But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it? With infinite power God could always create something better. ( Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, STh I, 25, 6.) But with infinite wisdom and

goodness God freely willed to create a world “in a state of journeying” toward its ultimate perfection. In God’s plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the disappearance of others, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection. (Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, SCG III, 71.)

CCC 311 Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil.<sup>176</sup> He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it.

- **What is the relationship between spirituality and morality?**

When we act in alignment with God’s will, we act morally. This action is profoundly spiritual at its core.

CCC 1762 The human person is ordered to beatitude by his deliberate acts: the passions or feelings he experiences can dispose him to it and contribute to it.

CCC 1795 “Conscience is man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths” (GS 16).

CCC 1760 A morally good act requires the goodness of its object, of its end, and of its circumstances together.

CCC 1761 There are concrete acts that it is always wrong to choose, because their choice entails a disorder of the will, i.e., a moral evil. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.

CCC 1770 Moral perfection consists in man’s being moved to the good not by his will alone, but also by his sensitive appetite, as in the words of the psalm: “My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.”( Ps 84:2.)

- **Is it possible to be purely good without the assistance of God? Pelagius first popularized this notion in the Church’s earlier history and it seems supportable and logical. What is the Church’s answer and reasoning?**

No. Think of Jesus' answer to the Rich Young Man: "As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. (Mark 10:17-19)

All have sinned: Romans 5:12-14 - Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come..."

We need Jesus to justify us. CCC 1989 The first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion, effecting justification in accordance with Jesus' proclamation at the beginning of the Gospel: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, thus accepting forgiveness and righteousness from on high. "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.

- **Is it wrong to speak (badly) of the deceased when it was pretty clear that they were scoundrels?**

To speak ill of anyone, living or dead, is a failure in love. Who are we to determine whom God has saved?

CCC 1055 By virtue of the "communion of saints," the Church commends the dead to God's mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.

CCC 1058 The Church prays that no one should be lost: "Lord, let me never be parted from you." If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him "all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

- **Where does one draw the line between good and evil? When does a "good" person become a "bad" one? Sometimes people will list the character flaws of an individual and then say "but he/she's a good person." (Example: "He often yells and argues with his wife, is very cynical, is not patient with children, and has a big drinking problem, but he's a good person.")**

Sin is the line between good and evil. It is a failure in genuine love.

CCC 1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”

CCC 1865 Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root.

- **Is abortion unjust even if people claim it is necessary to save the life of a would-be mother?**

Yes, abortion is unjust as the intent is the killing of the unborn child. One must ask in considering this; “which life is more important, the child’s or the mother’s? The answer is that both lives are sacred and loved infinitely by God.

CCC Glossary - Abortion: Deliberate termination of pregnancy by killing the unborn child. Such direct abortion, willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life (2271–2272).

CCC 2274 Since it must be treated from conception as a person, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed, as far as possible, like any other human being. Prenatal diagnosis is morally licit, “if it respects the life and integrity of the embryo and the human fetus and is directed toward its safeguarding or healing as an individual.... It is gravely opposed to the moral law when this is done with the thought of possibly inducing an abortion, depending upon the results: a diagnosis must not be the equivalent of a death sentence.”( CDF, *Donum vitae* I, 2.)

CCC 1756 It is therefore an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances (environment, social pressure, duress or emergency, etc.) which supply their context. There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.

